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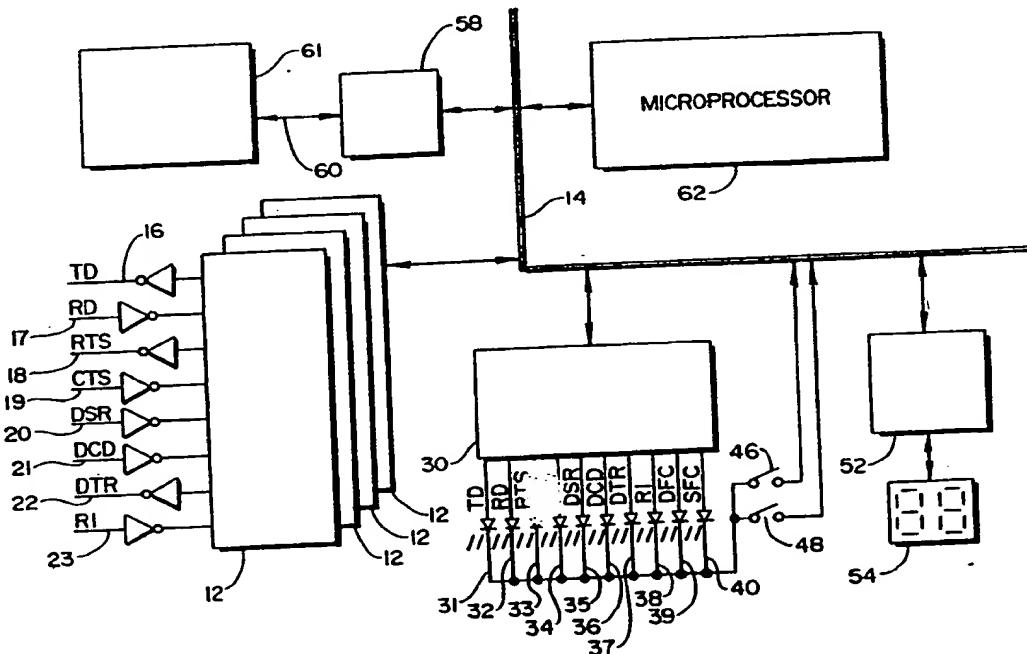
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(71) Applicant: DIGI INTERNATIONAL, INC. [US/US]; 6400 Flying Cloud Drive, Eden Prairie, MN 55344 (US).		Published <i>With international search report.</i>
(72) Inventors: OLSON, Gene, H. ; 5131 Aldrich Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55419 (US). RABE, Jeffrey, T. ; 16226 Woodland Lane, Minnetonka, MN 55345 (US).		
(74) Agent: STEFFEY, Charles, E.; Faegre & Benson, 2200 Norwest Center, 90 South Seventh Street, Minneapolis, MN 55402-3901 (US).		

(54) Title: PANEL DISPLAY OF CHANNEL AND SYSTEM STATUS INFORMATION FOR MULTICHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS DEVICE



(57) Abstract

A diagnostic display for a multi-channel asynchronous serial ports (12) peripheral which provides an indication on a common array of indicators (31-40) of the status of each signal and modem line and input and output flow control and is switchable between ports.

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PANEL DISPLAY OF CHANNEL AND SYSTEM STATUS  
INFORMATION FOR MULTICHANNEL COMMUNICATIONS DEVICE  
Background of the Invention

For years breakout boxes have been used to  
05 diagnose problems and monitor the activity of RS-232  
lines. Such breakout boxes may include red and green  
LEDs flickering in response to direct connection to  
transmit, receive and modem control signals. Such  
breakout boxes conventionally have a single indicator  
10 for each function and there is no provision for using  
a particular LED for display of multiple or selected  
functions. Use of a permanently installed breakout  
box as a display device would be cumbersome in  
devices where as many as eight ports are to be  
15 continuously monitored.

It is also well known in the art to use  
asynchronous serial ports boards to communicate with  
modems, printers, terminals and other computers.

The present invention combines the  
20 diagnostic and monitoring functions with multiple  
channel communications board functions in a single  
box that can perform both roles. It also adds some  
diagnostic features not present in the prior art.

There have been other inventions that

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05 combine a breakout box with another function. For example, most medium to high priced modems come standard with several LEDs arranged on the case of the unit to indicate transmit, receive, Terminal ready, Carrier detect and other functions such as communication speed.

10 It is also known in the prior art to provide a modem rack containing 1 to 10 card-pluggable modems, with a front panel display switchable to any of the 10 modems, with the single display showing the status of the same signals commonly handled on individual modems.

15 There have even been some previous asynchronous terminal port products that have displayed some status indication for each channel as well. One product showed transmit and receive data simultaneously for each of 1 to 8 terminals, on 16 front-mounted LEDs.

20 None of the prior products have displayed the information on ports and communications lines and on the system in the unique manner of the present invention as described below.

Brief Description of the Drawings

25 Fig. 1 is a block diagram of the multiple port communications processor according to the present invention.

Detailed Description of the Drawings

30 The display functions in accordance with the present invention combine in a unique manner the provision on individual channel operation and system operation and selectively display it on a single array of LEDs and a numeric display showing the function or channel selected. The display functions include:

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- \* A "select one of several ports", breakout box monitor feature.
  - \* A numeric indication of the currently displayed port.
- 05 \* An algorithm to flicker the transmit/receive indicating LEDs to make the displays appear to be indicating transmission and receipt of data.
- 10 \* Diagnostic signals indicative of IFC and OFC status.
- 15 \* Integration and display of the above-mentioned features together with the other status displays AC, PC, PU, LU, and EC etc. on the same array of indicators on the same physical display hardware.
- Referring now to Fig. 1, the components that cooperate as a part of the present invention are shown. A typical peripheral device 10 embodying the present invention is a data concentrator having multiple UARTs 12 communicating with a data bus 14. Each UART has terminals 16 through 23 either communicating or receiving control signals relating to the operation of that UART. Data on the status of the control signals on terminals 16 through 23 is available on data bus 14 and accessed by the LED latch circuitry 30 which in turn drives, in the preferred embodiment shown, ten LEDs 31 through 40 which are mounted so that their light output is visible on the outside of the case of the data concentrator 10.
- 30 A pair of mode selector switches 46 and 48 are used to step the latch circuitry 30 and 52 through a sequence of modes to display the indications for each of the UARTs 12 and through the

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05 system functions of the entire device as discussed in further detail below. A set of display latches 52 also receives information from bus 14 which enables it to display characters on a character indicator which, in the preferred embodiment disclosed comprises a pair of seven segment LED displays 54 which indicate which port is having its individual indications displayed or which systems operating functions are being displayed.

10 The concentrator according to the present invention, as shown in its preferred embodiment in FIG. 1 is unique in a number of important ways from prior art breakout and monitor arrangements.

15 The operator can choose which of the functions to display with two left/right auto-repeat buttons 46 and 48 on the front panel to cycle the LED latch 30 and display latch 52 through the sequence of available functions. The identification of the particular display or monitor function chosen is indicated on display 54 and the status is displayed 20 on LEDs 31 through 38.

The display selections available for the entire device or concentrator 10 are:

25           AC - Activity  
         PC - Packet Count  
         PU - Processor Utilization  
         LU - Line Utilization  
         EC - Error Count

30           01 - Port 1 status  
         02 - Port 2 status

\* \* \*

16 - Port 16 status

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When the AC mode is selected to provide a visual display of the activity of the operation of the system in which the peripheral device or concentrator is a part, the AC display function in the software for the panel generates signals to sequentially illuminate adjacent LEDs in the array of LEDs 31 through 40 at a precession rate of about one position each 1/2 second. For each active (transmit or receive) port, that precession speed is increased by one position each 1/2 second, so that when the system or concentrator is idle the display updates regularly, but when it becomes busy, the precession of the light display across the diode array appears to be quite rapid.

Note that the PC, EC, PU and LU displays below refer to the status of a serial line 60 connecting the host computer 61 through a serial controller card 58 to bus 14 in concentrator 10. This serial line can operate at various speeds and in various modes over modems, 4-wire links and 8-wire links. A host computer interface card which operates in accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention supports two such communication lines, each of which may "daisy-chain" connect to up to 8 concentrator boxes.

The PC and EC display functions use the 10 status LEDs 31 through 40 as a binary counter, where all lights OFF are zero, the right most LED ON is one, and so on. The PC function displays the lower ten bits of the count of all the packets received since startup. The EC function shows a one minute time-weighted average of the number of errors recently encountered. As a result PC updates quickly as packets are received and transmitted (can be 300

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packets per second) while EC tends to remain dark unless there are data communication errors.

The PU and LU functions are respectively representative of the 0-100% utilization bar graphs of the processor and of line utilization. Processor utilization is scaled to be zero when the concentrator 10 is idle, and 100% when it is beginning to fall behind on its duties. Likewise Line Utilization is scaled to be zero when communication line 60 is idle. An indication of 100% means that the line is operating at approximately 100% of its theoretical maximum throughput.

When the information relating to the operation of an individual port is selected, the following indications for that port are displayed on LEDs 31 through 40 respectively:

TxD - Transmit data

RxD - Receive data

RTS - Request to send  
CTS - Clear to send  
DSR - Data set ready  
DCD - Data Carrier Detect  
DTR - Data terminal ready  
RI - Ring Indicator

All of these signals reflecting the status of an individual port are software controlled, mimicking the signals one would see on a regular breakout box which directly reads the signals present at their respective terminals. In the implementation illustrated as a part of the preferred embodiment disclosed, the checking of the signal is

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periodically sampled and the display is updated about 50 times per second.

In the case of transmit and receive data, users accustomed to hard wired breakout boxes are accustomed to seeing hardware LED indications flash as data is sent. In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the software mimics this operation using a random number generator to flash the LEDs with about a 70% ON duty cycle. The visual effect is reassuringly close to the familiar pattern. One difference is that since the display according to the present invention is updated every 1/50th second, a single character at a high baud rate results in at least a 1/50th second flash. This is far more visible than one flash for less than 1/4000 second which would be used in prior art breakout box monitors to indicate most characters at a data rate 38400 baud.

The next six display signals RTS, CTS, DSR, DCD, DTR and RI all turn ON steady when active, as do their counterparts on hardware devices.

In addition to the above functions, the monitor detects and displays two additional diagnostic criteria which are as follows:

25

OFC - Output Flow Control Active  
IFC - Input Flow Control Active.

30

Output Flow Control is active when a flow control stop character has been received from a remote device or when a remote device is signalling that it is not ready to receive data by dropping at least one of a user configured set of modem control lines. When output flow control is active, the port

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is inhibited from sending data, and then the OFC LED  
39 comes ON to indicate this fact. Prior art  
monitoring and display systems have not provided a  
display of this signal. Noting the presence of this  
05 condition and determining the reason for it is a  
common task of a computer system administrator.

Input Flow Control is active when the local  
device is no longer ready to receive data because its  
input buffer is full, and no internal program has yet  
10 read in the data. This condition may be signaled by  
sending a flow control stop character or by dropping  
a set of modem control signals. No display of this  
function was provided by prior monitoring and display  
devices. In any case, the IFC LED 40 comes ON to  
15 indicate to the system administrator the existence of  
the condition.

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What Is Claimed Is:

1. In a multi-channel communication device, an integrated display means for showing the status of each channel individually, comprising, in combination:
  - (a) indicator means having a plurality of ON-OFF indicating elements;
  - (b) monitor means operatively coupled to monitor the status of each of the channels;
  - (c) selector means coupled to the monitor means for selecting an individual channel to be monitored and providing status information relating that channel to the indicator means; and
  - (d) character indicator means coupled to the selector means for receiving information therefrom identifying the individual channel selected and for displaying a character identifying the selected channel.
2. The invention claimed in claim 1 wherein the character indicator means is a numeric display.
3. The invention claimed in claim 1 wherein the selector means includes switch means constructed and arranged for stepping the selector means through each of the channels.
4. The invention claimed in claim 1 wherein the switch means comprises a pair of switches constructed and arranged for stepping the selector means through the channels in opposite directions.

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5. The invention claimed in claim 1 wherein one of the elements of the indicator means displays Transmit Data status information for the selected channel.

6. The invention claimed in claim 1 wherein one of the elements of the indicator means displays Receive Data status information for the selected channel.

7. The invention claimed in claim 1 wherein one of the elements of the indicator means displays Request to Send status information for the selected channel.

8. The invention claimed in claim 1 wherein one of the elements of the indicator means displays Clear to Send status information for the selected channel.

9. The invention claimed in claim 1 wherein one of the elements of the indicator means displays Data Set Ready status information for the selected channel.

10. The invention claimed in claim 1 wherein one of the elements of the indicator means displays Data Carrier Detect status information for the selected channel.

11. The invention claimed in claim 1 wherein one of the elements of the indicator means displays Data Terminal Ready status information for the selected channel.

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12. The invention claimed in claim 1 wherein one of the elements of the indicator means displays Ring Indicator status information for the selected channel.

13. The invention claimed in claim 1 wherein the monitor means determines whether output flow control is active on the port and one of the elements of the indicator means displays Output Flow Control Active status information for the selected channel.

14. The invention claimed in claim 1 wherein the monitor means determines whether input flow control is active on the port and one of the elements of the indicator means displays Input Flow Control Active status information for the selected channel.

15. In a multi-channel communication device, an integrated display means for showing the status of each channel individually and for displaying system information relating to operation of the device itself, comprising, in combination:

- (a) a plurality of indicator means mounted on the panel for providing ON-OFF indications in accordance with monitor means operatively coupled thereto;
- (b) channel monitor means for monitoring the status of each channel in the device;
- (c) system monitor means for monitoring the operation of the communication device; and
- (d) controlled means for operatively coupling either the channel monitor means or the system monitor means to

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the indicator means for displaying the status of a particular channel or for displaying system information.

16. The invention claimed in claim 1 or claim 15, where the communication device is an asynchronous serial multi-channel communication device.

17. The invention claimed in claim 15, wherein at least Transmit Data and Receive Data status signals are displayed on the indicator means.

18. The invention claimed in claim 15, wherein Transmit and Receive Data status signals are displayed on the indicator means and wherein said controlled means is controlled by software, and wherein the indicator means is constructed and arranged for flickering to simulate the appearance of an indicator which is directly connected to the status signals.

19. The invention claimed in claim 15, where the indicator means is constructed and arranged for display of at least one modem control signal selected from the group including RTS, CTS, DCD, DSR, DTR and RI.

20. The invention claimed in claim 15, where the indicator means is constructed and arranged for display of all of the modem signals RTS, CTS, DCD, DSR, DTR and RI.

21. The invention claimed in claim 15, where the indicator means is constructed and arranged for display of Input Flow Control active or Output Flow

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Control Active status signals.

22. The invention claimed in claim 15, wherein the indicator means is constructed and arranged for display of all of the status signals described in claims 17, 18, 19 and 20.

23. The invention claimed in claim 15, where the indicator means includes a character indicator which identifies the selected channel.

24. The invention claimed in claim 15 wherein additional status functions are displayed on the indicator means.

25. The invention claimed in claim 24, where the additional status functions displayed on the indicator means include a Processor Utilization signal showing the status of a serial line connecting the device to a host computer.

26. The invention claimed in claim 24, where the additional status functions include a Line Utilization signal.

27. The invention claimed in claim 24 where the additional functions include a communication line error indication.

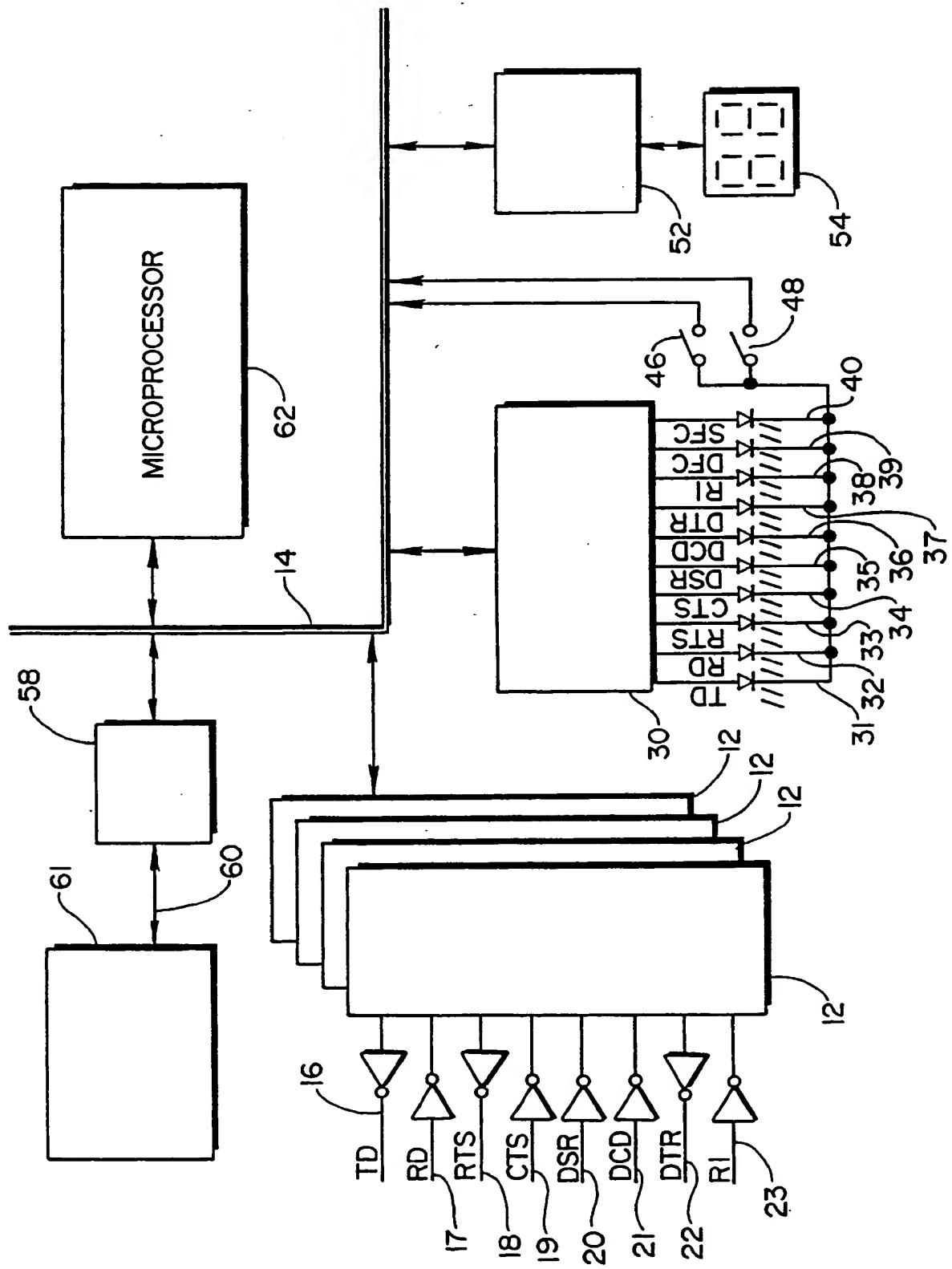
28. The invention claimed in claim 24, wherein the indicator means includes a plurality of elements which provide ON-OFF indications as an activity display which has a repeating pattern to show that the device and the system of which it is a part are

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operational.

29. The invention claimed in claim 28, where the activity display updates at differing speeds to indicate the level of system activity.

30. The invention claimed in claim 24, wherein the additional status functions displayed include a communication line packet count.



# INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No. PCT/US92/01561

## I. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both National Classification and IPC

**IPC (5): H04B 1/38, H04L 5/00**

**U.S.CI.: 340/825.A, 753,815.02; 375/8**

## II. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum Documentation Searched \*

Classification System

Classification Symbols

U.S.

340/825.16, 825.17, 815.02, 915.03, 753; 375/8, 10

Documentation Searched other than Minimum Documentation  
to the Extent that such Documents are Included in the Fields Searched \*

## III. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT \*

Category *	Citation of Document, ** with indication where appropriate of the relevant passages ***	Relevant Claims #
X	US, A, 4,646,320 (KRISHNAN) 24 February 1987	1-5, 7-10, 15-17
Y	See col. 3, lines 25-30, figure 5, col. 10, lines 25-30	19, 23-28, 30 13, 14, 21, 22
Y	US, A, 3,647,980 (FABIANO, JR. ET AL.) 07 MArch 1972 See col. 7, lines 9-22.	29 -
Y	US, A, 4,718,082 (PARKER ET AL.) 05 January 1988 See col. 6, lines 24-28.	6, 11, 12, 18 20

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X document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step

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## IV. CERTIFICATION

Date of the Actual Completion of the International Search

27 April 1992

Date of Mailing of this International Search Report

26 MAY

International Searching Authority

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Signature of Authorized Officer

Donald J. Yusko